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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

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June 19, 2007

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Philip L. Browning, Director

SUBJECT: ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE CalWORKs WELFARE-TO-WORK SANCTIONS

This is to provide you with the fifth status report on the Sanction Action Plan and resulting actions to prevent and reduce sanctions.

The Department's Sanction Action Plan was created in August 2005 to reduce sanctions based on the report, "Study of Sanctions Among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles: Who, When, and Why?" conducted by the Service Integration Branch of the Chief Administrative Office. Pursuant to the study and through a collaborative process, various strategies have been implemented to reduce sanctions. Under TANF Reauthorization, participants sanctioned for more than three months are included in the universe of cases to which the 50% work participation standard applies, making it increasingly important for the Department to focus on reengaging noncompliant/sanctioned individuals to increase the work participation rate.

The implementation of the Plan and resulting actions continue to show a very positive impact on reducing sanctions. Since sharing the Plan with you in August 2005, the number of sanctioned participants has been reduced by 7,783 or nearly 36%.

Short-Term Actions

The action items in the Plan were grouped into short-term, mid-term, and long-term action items. All of the short-term actions have been implemented. The major short-term action item, the GAIN Sanction Home Visit Outreach (GSHVO) project, implemented in November 2005, continues to prove successful. This project outreaches to individuals who are at risk of or in a sanction, with dedicated staff making contact by phone, letter or home visit, to resolve the participant's nonparticipation issue. As of March 2007, over 48,000 (75%) of those with whom intervention was attempted resolved their noncompliance/sanction. On June 7, 2007, the project was awarded a 2007 National Association of Counties Achievement Award in recognition of its effectiveness and innovation.

Mid-Term and Long-Term Strategies

Of these strategies, the majority has been implemented or will be implemented by the end of 2007. They include strategies to improve upfront engagement, facilitate a more expeditious and smoother process for resolving noncompliance/sanctions, enhance communication, and promote progress in systems and program design where possible. Specifically, since the last update, the Department is doing the following:

- Increasing upfront engagement by:
 - √ Combining Orientation and Job Club to reduce the time lag between the two activities and to promote higher show rates for Job Club. This strategy is showing positive results, showcasing a 79% Job Club show rate in the first three months of a phased-in implementation. Offices under the old design are currently experiencing only a 33% show rate for Job Club. The new redesign should be implemented Countywide by the end of summer 2007.
 - √ Taking steps early in the CalWORKs application process to inform participants about GAIN and its services. After the participant is deemed potentially eligible for CalWORKs, eligibility staff make a home visit to complete the eligibility determination process and provide information about GAIN services, including child care, transportation, work-related expenses and Specialized Supportive Services (Domestic Violence, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse).

In addition to these Countywide efforts, on a pilot basis in one region, during this eligibility home visit, applicants are given appointment dates to see the GAIN Services Worker for the first GAIN appointment, with the goal of increasing the likelihood of individuals showing up for the appointment and ultimately succeeding in the program. Countywide implementation is pending the results of the pilot.

- Enabling participants to resolve their noncompliance/sanction by:
 - √ Interviewing sanctioned participants when they come to the CalWORKs district office for their annual redetermination appointment to reengage them in the welfare-to-work process. Early results reflect that this strategy is highly successful, with about 96% of participants interviewed agreeing to participate in the GAIN program or resolving their sanction by qualifying for an exemption or temporary good cause not to participate.
 - √ Designating specialized staff to provide additional support to participants whose exemptions are about to expire. This staff assists individuals to reenter the program or, if the reason for exemption still exists (e.g., a disability), the staff assist the participant in obtaining any documentation needed to extend the exemption, reducing the risk of the participant falling into noncompliance.
 - √ Ensuring full-time employed participants are not placed in noncompliance/sanction by modifying the GEARS computer system to block the imposition of these actions when full-time employment information is received from the LEADER computer system. Previously, if a working participant did not disclose his/her job to GAIN staff and did not otherwise interact with case management staff, the GEARS computer system would record the person as a "no show" for missing a GAIN appointment and automatically initiate the noncompliance process. Now, an automation enhancement has been implemented that (1) ensures earnings are passed over to GEARS, and (2) prevents initiation of noncompliance for any participant working full-time hours.

Work has recently begun on two long-term action items which are designed to enhance communication with our participants. Specifically, we are exploring solutions to readability issues with our forms, working with the Department of Consumer Affairs, as the lead on Plain Language, to determine whether their software/system would meet our needs. If not, we would next pursue a contract with a readability expert, mirroring the State's approach, to ensure our written communications are at a reading level appropriate for our participants to ensure understanding and reduce the risk of noncompliance. Also, we are securing a business consultant, with a strong background in reviewing automated systems, to review the GAIN program and its processes to determine if there are ways to enhance its effectiveness for our participants.

I will update your Board again in six months on our continued progress in preventing and reducing sanctions.

PLB:fa

c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Deputy, CEO
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors